

FAC Subject

22 MAR 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR: Interior Design Committee

SUBJECT : Exploiting GSA Services

1. I read the attached with some interest and recommend that you spend a half-hour or so with it. Several ideas came to mind on how we might take advantage of what GSA has to offer. You may have more:

a. Seminars. We ought to try to get one or more of the "bright faces" mentioned in the article out here to speak to the FAC soon--specifically, Sorowles, Striner, Reinsel, and/or Rudick. I suggest that [redacted] take this one on because he knows more about the mysteries of GSA than the rest of us. I would like to have someone talk to us at our April meeting if possible.

STATINTL

b. Site visits. There is considerable discussion in the article on open plan systems furniture. Several experiments are mentioned and some interesting GSA restrictions. We ought to find out who has used the open space concept successfully and visit them. GSA should be able to give us leads. Again, I suggest that [redacted] do this.

STATINTL

c. Hydroponics. We ought to find out more about GSA's work on soil-less plantings. [redacted] mentioned this some time back and this article reminded me. I would like her to look into this and report to the Commission within the next two months.

STATINTL

2. You might get other ideas as you read this: leads on people who could be of use to us or OL, finding out how to work "the system" better, etc. I would be interested in hearing your comments.

151
[redacted]

Chairman
Fine Arts Commission

STATINTL

federal design

Within the government,
new faces,
new design awareness,
new humanism,
new optimism,
new research. Outside
the government, some
of the old skepticism.

Some years ago, Nelson Rockefeller, then Governor of New York, made the dramatic pledge that, within a year, he would transform the Long Island Railroad—then sluggish in every aspect but its rattling—into the nation's finest railroad. Commuters snickered; the year passed; the Long Island is sluggish and rattling still. This incident comes to mind because we are about to make a prediction that seems similarly rash. We don't guarantee a thing, of course, but it is possible—just possible—that, within a few years, *the U.S. federal government could become this country's major force for good interior design.*

The government? With all that bureaucracy, all those disinterested civil service workers, those endless corridors, those gray metal desks? Well, yes, but the government wasn't always that way, remember. Thomas Jefferson, with his design for the Virginia State Capitol (he was then Ambassador to France) set the whole course of American taste for the following half century; and the succession of government buildings that followed—the White House and the Capitol, to name just two—were no slouches. In many American towns today, the only important buildings of character are government buildings—court houses, customs houses, post offices.

Is a return to that level of quality possible with our present plurality of taste and our monstrously overgrown government? It may be, and partly because our government is retrenching somewhat: the monster is shedding a few of its excess pounds. What this means specifically for the General Services Administration, landlord for ten thousand government properties, is that it now needs outside help; outside help can be pretty good. As David Dibner, the GSA's accomplished new Assistant Commissioner for Construction (and previously Vice-President of the Walker-

Grad interior design firm) pointed out to us, President Carter's struggles towards a balanced budget have meant manpower reductions for many federal agencies. For the GSA, this change in staffing has suggested a change in operation: instead of trying to do all design itself, the GSA is now trying to *manage* creatively the design of others. This is a healthy development, it seems clear, both for quality-hungry government employees and for job-hungry non-government designers.

There are similarly sweet uses of adversity in other parts of the government. Lynne Sprowles, ASID, IBD, working outside the GSA's central office, but Chief of the Interior Design Branch of its important Region 3 (which includes Washington, D.C.), says that the response of her 12-member design staff to Carter's demand that federal workspace be reduced 10 percent is *not* to cram additional people into existing work areas but to seek imaginative ways of making previously wasted space usable.

And "the feds" seem to have developed—after a rather lengthy post-Jefferson hiatus—an understanding of what good design is, what good design can do. This is true, obviously, in the higher echelons—it is true for Dibner and his also-new boss, GSA Administrator Jay Solomon, for example, and Joan Mondale's concern for the arts doesn't hurt a bit. Perhaps of even more importance, though (for higher echelons of government tend to come and go as administrations change), it seems to be true as well on lower levels. Some "young Turks" of GSA's middle management—such as Joel Rudick, Chief of the Interior Planning and Design Branch of the Professional Services Division (previously with SLS Environetics for nine years, running their San Francisco office for five of them) and Rick Hendricks, of the Office of Space Management—seem full of ideas, enthusiasm, and energy. And there are professions represented on the staff now that were never there in the old days—industrial design, for example (Terry West of the National Furniture Center), and environmental psychology (Ron Reinsel of the Professional Services Division).

The GSA's Special Programs Division, until recently the brightest hope for progressive development, is being dismantled in a general reorganization. This does not, however, seem to be indicative of failure but of success: special programs are less necessary than before because their goals have been assimilated by the GSA as a whole.

As architect Herb Beckhard, a partner in the firm of Marcel Breuer and Associates, says, "The comforting thing is that the government now has people with real ability and taste. They're not jerks." In the years 1963-68, the Breuer firm's work on the Washington headquarters building for the Department of Housing and Urban Development was, Beckhard says, "an exercise in frustration." But their recent work on the nearby Humphrey Building for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare has been a different matter. The government (especially, according to Beckhard, in

designer) was genuinely interested in the architects' opinions and active participation. "There was no jealousy, no duplicity—we worked together like true associates," Beckhard says.

George Finley, Editor of INDUSTRIAL DESIGN magazine, thinks there is "no question that there has been a tremendous increase in design awareness on the part of those who specify furnishings and commission designers. This awareness can't help but have an effect."

But C. Kent Slepicka, an important force within the GSA for ten years (until last August) and now President of CKS Design in Georgetown and consultant to the ASID as its Director of Professional Practice, has a less sanguine view. He considers Jay Solomon "tremendously innovative" and sees Dibner's arrival as "good news," but he feels the task ahead is "monumental in scope." Only "a few diehards fighting their way" can make progress towards quality in the government establishment, he feels, and "such zealots in government are often singled out as freaks and then attacked. It will be impossible to get quality design," he says, "until the government *quantifies* it into its rules and regulations. We must find ways to *legislate* good design."

Slepicka does recognize some current GSA developments as valuable, and recognizes as well a "major effort" from the National Endowment for the Arts, but he sees much room for improvement. And some of the solutions he imagines are as big as the problems he sees: "We now have a Department of Energy. Why not a Department of Design? Not necessarily on the cabinet level . . . but why not?"

More immediate concerns are voiced by those private contractors who deal directly with the government. William LaCorte of the Ginn Company sees genuine progress towards government purchases of "upgraded, state-of-the-art products," but he sees also that the government is "still buying buggy whips and hoop-skirts—merchandise no-one else would buy and which is no longer available in the commercial marketplace. The result is high prices for antiquated products." And Henry Davis of Charles G. Stott & Co. recalls invoices of over half a million dollars waiting more than 30 days for government payment. Some take even longer. "If you don't know how to collect," he warns, "you can go out of business."

Even within the government there are doubts ("off the record, please"). One designer, while admitting to a few real federal accomplishments, warned that much of the optimistic talk around GSA was "just smokescreen."

Problems, obviously, persist. But even the cynics see some improvement in federal design attitudes. What, generally, is the nature of that improvement? Perhaps two key words in describing it are "humanism" and "research." Government planning for the future—and important post-design evaluation of work already done—is concentrating on the effects buildings and spaces are having on the people who use them, and a host of new informational and educational tools are in use to study and explain these effects. More specifically, what are the current activities of the GSA? Three completed or results are described below. Research planned for the near future is

also listed.

The federal government's involvement with interior design is not, of course, limited to the work of the GSA. In September, the fourth Federal Design Assembly, meeting in Washington, will focus on interior design; the National Endowment for the Arts has promoted interior designer Bert Kubli to Staff Officer (see "Uncle Sam, AIA, ASID" in CONTRACT INTERIORS, January 1978); and there is design activity as well in such branches as the Federal Design Council and the Office of Cultural Resources (part of the Department of Commerce).

The total federal design story is a long one, and much of it is wearily dull. But ambition and knowledge are being energetically employed now in Washington, and there is no reason why our government, given this ambition and knowledge, could not learn to use its enormous resources and purchasing power as a positive influence on design practice. The next chapter in the history of federal design could be a very happy one for all of us.

We will look now at some details of federal design activity and at a number of the many ways in which government and design are interacting.

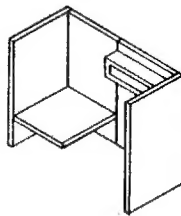
systems furniture evaluation results

Perhaps the most interesting and encouraging recent activity of the GSA is its study of open plan systems furniture. The immediate goal was to find suitable furniture for the Hubert H. Humphrey building, new headquarters of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; another goal was to provide the Federal Supply Service with an evaluation of systems furniture prior to its making such furniture available for other government agencies. HEW, the FSS, and the Public Buildings Service cooperated in the testing of four categories of systems furniture at different locations within the HEW building. Four specific systems were chosen as "surrogates," each representing a category of structurally similar systems by a number of different manufacturers. As reported here in December, 1976, the four surrogates were: Steelcase, InterRoyal, Herman Miller, and Knoll.

A contract for the evaluation of the four installations was won by BOSTI (Buffalo Organization for Social and Technological Innovation, Inc.), the Buffalo, New York, firm headed by architect Mike Brill, who calls himself an "Environmental Diagnostician." Brill's four-month study, with particular emphasis (at HEW's request) on the adaptability of the systems for use by *handicapped* employees, used direct observation, written questionnaires, photographic observation, and interviews with both users and their supervisors to determine a score for each system. GSA, HEW, and Brill all emphasize two points about the results of the study: first, that the scores given relate only to how furniture works in one particular building; completely different results might be produced in another situation; and, second, that the systems studied were each evaluated on their own merits, with freestanding or interlocking panels.

for the entire building, now in progress, will use furniture of the type rated highest by BOSTI, but *not* necessarily furniture by the particular manufacturer used in the test. The four categories, their descriptions, their surrogates, and (according to the BOSTI study) their order of rank are:

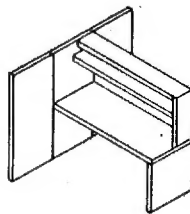
Category 1:



A system developed from freestanding work and vertical storage assemblies with interlocking spanner panels.

Surrogate tested: Steelcase 9000
Rank order: third.

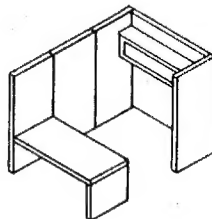
Category 2:



A system of interlocking panels combined with suspended work-surface and storage components.

Surrogate tested: Herman Miller Action Office II
Rank order: first.

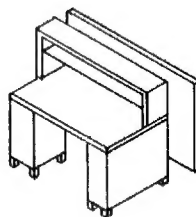
Category 3:



A system of freestanding, self-contained work and storage assemblies.

Surrogate tested: Knoll Zapf
Rank order: second.

Category 4:



Surrogate tested: InterRoyal
Rank order: fourth.

Although the category represented by Herman Miller was rated a clear first place for this particular building, using BOSTI's particular handicapped-oriented criteria, the other three categories—represented by InterRoyal, Knoll, and Steelcase—were all rated relatively closely together. The results might, therefore, be read as one first place and three seconds. Vivien Woofor of HEW points out, as well, that none of the four categories was rated as perfect by BOSTI.

As it did for the task ambient lighting study, the GSA's Design Action Center has published a number of "lessons learned" from the systems furniture study. They include:

"Pre-move and post-move orientation sessions should be given to all workers who will be located in open-planned areas. A separate orientation session should be provided for all supervisors.

"Researchers observed that the practice of having senior people in private office is a powerful deterrent to worker satisfaction with open planning and systems furniture.

"Several fully private, four-person enclosed spaces should be maintained in open-planned areas for confidential and secure matters.

"In layout and planning there should be no visual access from main corridors to workstations, thus affording freedom from work distractions.

"A place should be designated near storage or entry points for group displays and notices. Most furniture systems include an information kiosk. The use of this component should be explored.

"Careful attention should be given to flexibility of location of telephone and power outlets to accommodate changes and to address the needs of left- and right-hand users.

"Acoustic considerations become paramount in open-office planning. Top-quality acoustic ceilings should be used to ensure the success of open planning.

"Since the use of systems furniture is predicated on its capacity for adaptability, the researchers emphasize that the conversion of a workstation for use by a handicapped worker should be no more than an overnight job. In addition, they state that an adequately flexible furniture system should be able to accommodate organizational changes with ease.

"A user's manual should be developed and given to workers to aid optimum use of the system.

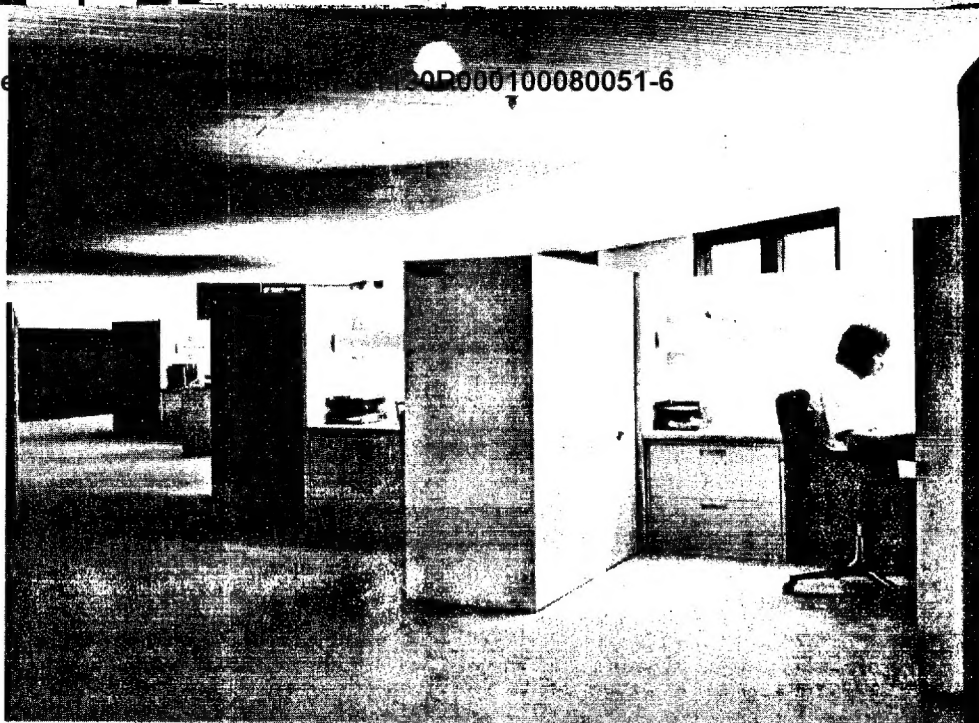
"A graphic identification system should be provided that includes information related to the building floor, office area, and programs. The signage must be carefully located. The furniture system must also provide for the attachment of name and title plates since few status-differentiating devices are available in open-planned areas."

hydroponics study

...the expensive—the GSA now spends \$42,000 a year for plant maintenance in

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MAX O. URBAHN ASSOCIATES
**FEDERAL HOME LOAN
BANK BOARD**



Photography by Alexandre Georges

Commerce meets government

For the first time, a federal office building welcomes private tenants.

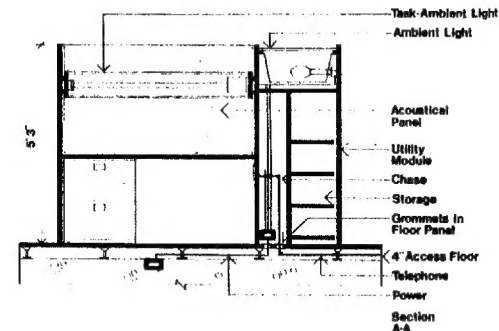
When the Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act was passed in 1976, mandating the inclusion in government buildings of space leased to private-sector commerce, planning on the Home Loan Bank Board building was already well along. The building thus becomes the first to be completed in compliance with the new act. If this first example proves to be typical, the policy—and the legislation supporting it—are great urban assets. (And with President Carter's interest in urban problems, no federal buildings are going up these days anywhere *but* in urban situations.)

Both architecture and interior design of the Bank Board building are products of the office of Max. O. Urbahn Associates, with Jo Standley project designer, with some design input in early planning stages from the Alexandria, Virginia, office of Hunter-Miller, and with a watchful eye on the whole process from the General Services Administration, with J. Wayne Kulig acting as the GSA's project manager. (A watchful eye, in this case, was not difficult, for the GSA headquarters is in the next block.)

Kulig points out that the building is innovative in other respects as well—energy saving features, for example. One of these is something called a “tepid water system.” This provides, in men's and women's toilet lavatories, single faucets dispensing water at a temperature (about 105°) just about right for washing hands. This saves water, water-heating energy, and piping, Kulig says.

Office planning has some inventive features here, too. The building was designed for open plan office operation, but the Urbahn firm felt no one open plan system on the market offered all the features they wanted; their solution was to design furniture of their own. The Urbahn cabinetwork links utility modules containing electrical power sources; in addition, there are work modules (which use standard filing cabinets as pedestals) and S-shaped space divider panels which establish the boundaries of different departments. A custom-designed task ambient lighting system complements the furniture. And beneath all this are carpeted total-access floors that can easily accommodate installation of new electronic data processing equipment or the quick relocation of workstation power lines.

But, in a city where all the other government buildings turn into morgues by 5:30 pm, the most distinctive feature of the Bank Board building is its mixture of uses. A card-games-gift shop is already open on the ground floor, a skate shop and skating rink in the central courtyard (designed by Sasaki Associates) was opened last winter to great success, and space has already been leased for a restaurant and other shops.



federal design

the Washington area alone—and fake plants, whether or not you can tolerate their looks, may give off toxic fumes in case of fire. The Public Buildings Service of the GSA has been undertaking for two years now a study of hydroponics—a soil-less technique of plant support—that promises substantial cost reduction for indoor plant care. Results of the study are on press now and will soon be available by writing:

Chief, Landscape Design Branch
Public Buildings Service
General Services Administration
Washington, D.C., 20405.

task ambient lighting study

Task ambient lighting in systems furniture has for more than a year been the subject of a GSA study at the Norris Cotton Federal Building in Manchester, New Hampshire. A performance-type specification for the lighting was developed by Interspace of Washington, D.C., and the low bidder among those responding was Eppinger Furniture, Inc. The cost of all lighting installed for the 12,000 sq. ft. demonstration area was \$1.41 per sq. ft., delivered and installed, and the first nine months of the study have shown an energy use of only 1.65 watts per sq. ft. (The spec. had prescribed a maximum of 2 watts.)

The GSA's Design Action Center, a key communications center masterminded by resourceful Erma Striner, a former interior designer, has published "lessons learned" from the study. They include five recommendations for designers and five for furniture manufacturers, not limited to lighting alone:

"Recommendations for Designers of Work Environments:

"The user need survey must be comprehensive. The functional requirements of each individual should be determined by interviewing that individual. The researchers reported that it is not appropriate to allow supervisors or others to state what an individual needs with respect to furnishings, or needs for visual and acoustical privacy.

"The plan developed for a specific organization must reflect a thorough understanding of the structure and communication patterns that exist in that organization.

"The design phase of the project should stress anthropometric fit (relating dimensions of the furniture to human dimensions). After installation, designers should make certain that the configuration reflects the planned dimensions for access areas and that the placement of overhead storage components, kneehole clearances, and so on, meet the requirements outlined in the performance specification.

"Adequate task ambient lighting must be planned for the total area.

"Signage systems should be incorporated in the developed plan, since a lack of signage has hampered communications activities

Work stations, above left, are diagonal in plan, designed by the architects with some elements from GF and Knoll. Diagram, middle left, is vertical section through work station, showing connections to underfloor wiring. Bottom left, exterior view looking towards Executive Office Building. This page, top, six floor high interior light well. Left, raised floor panel reveals power access.

Chairs and some workstation elements: Knoll. Partitions and floors: Tate Architectural Products. Files: GF. Lighting: Mark Lighting. Ceiling: Standard Acoustics. Millwork: Haggarty Millwork. Blinds: Levelor.

federal design

within an organization. Signs are also needed to identify organizational components and individuals.

"Recommendations for Manufacturers of Systems Furniture:

"Ventilated wardrobe storage should be provided. In addition, the bottom of the wardrobe should be equipped with a water-resistant surface.

"Workers cited a need for larger pencil drawers. Some workers preferred not to have pencil drawers located in the knee well area. In addition, workers preferred different dimensions for paper organizers than the dimensions provided in the installed system.

"Workers did not use the task lighting placed over the narrower (secondary) worksurface very frequently, unless they were typists.

"Placement of the light switches for task ambient lighting is important. Switches must be easy for a worker to reach if the lighting is to be controlled by the user so that energy savings can be realized.

"The flexibility of a system should be demonstrated prior to its installation."

GSA was joined in the Manchester study by the Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA), the National Bureau of Standards, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

systems furniture on federal schedule

The "schedule" of the Federal Supply System is, in effect, the giant shopping list of items which government agencies may buy (in addition to those items which the government keeps in stock). To purchase items neither in stock nor on schedule is, in most cases, not allowed. Until very recently no open plan systems furniture was on schedule, but the situation is changing. One GSA list published in April 1978 showed the following lines on schedule:

Conwed Concept 2
Steelcase 9000
Pleion Time Line
Steelcase Mobiles
Haworth Unigroup
Westinghouse ASD
GF ESP Workstations
Herman Miller Action Office
Knoll Zapf
JG UPS.

A more recent addition to the schedule, we are told, is the complete line of systems furniture by American Seating.

There still are restrictions, however, on the purchase of open plan systems, even for those items on schedule. These restrictions include the following:

That only projects judged (by both the central office and the appropriate regional office of the GSA) to be suitable for open plan systems furniture will be allowed to place orders;

that only projects of more than 200 workstations will be so judged;

that professional space planning services must be provided by the client agency;

that no old furniture can be mixed with the new systems furniture;

and that a post-occupancy evaluation must also be paid for by the client agency.

An eventual relaxing of these restrictions is, of course, planned; this relaxing will probably take place in stages: first, regional decisions alone will determine which projects are suitable—no approval by the central office will be necessary; second, some agencies will develop their own standards, and decision regarding suitability can be made without any GSA approval.

other changes to the federal schedule

Within the GSA is the Federal Supply Service, and within the FSS is the National Furniture Center. It is here that the federal supply schedule is maintained, and it is on this schedule that some important changes are taking place.

The most dramatic recent addition to the schedule, already mentioned, is that of systems furniture. But Terry West, a young industrial designer who has been at the National Furniture Center since 1974, foresees other changes that will effect the *basic nature* of schedule purchasing. Specifically, he says that the schedule will soon be employing performance requirements, grading furniture items into those suitable for light, medium, or heavy use. The government has been working over the last year and a half with Purdue University to develop tests for the strength of upholstered pieces, and other testing procedures are being considered. Performance grading would introduce to schedule buying a new factor: the relationship of dollar value to length of furniture life. Implications for manufacturers are profound.

new open plan criteria for the handicapped

One result of the systems furniture evaluation in the HEW building is a new set of HEW guidelines for open plan office areas¹ use by the handicapped. Still in preparation, the guidelines tentatively include these requirements:

"Dimensions and clearances of each work station shall allow a 60" x 60" clear floor area so that a wheelchair can make an unobstructed 360° turn within the work station. The clear turning space must be maintained up to 10" above the floor, at which height clear turning space may reduce to approximately 48" x 48".

"Panel or component supports such as legs shall not be more than 1/2" high nor intruded into a circulation area more than 9".

"When more than one panel is used in a linear assembly, there shall be a minimum of one panel attached to the assembly at an angle

"An aisle width of 60" minimum shall be

provided on at least one side of each work station. Each work station must permit entry and exit for wheelchair bound persons on that side.

"Work station components shall be capable of being adjusted incrementally to meet individual users' needs with respect to the height of work surfaces and the accessibility of storage above the work surface.

"Work surface units shall have an under-surface kneespace of 32" minimum width.

"All work surface heights other than typing and conference tables shall have a clear space between the floor and underside of the work surface that adjusts from 25" minimum to 30".

"Primary work surfaces shall provide a minimum horizontal leg clearance depth of 20".

"The unobstructed vertical leg clearance when measured from the normal seat plane of 17" shall be a minimum of 10".

"Personal storage, hooks, or hanging facilities inside a wardrobe shall be adaptable to 66" and 48" from the floor.

"The capability for addition of auxiliary work surface lighting shall be required for those work stations that may be obstructed from the existing ceiling light.

"All horizontal work surfaces shall support 200 lbs. at the outer center edge without tipping or displacement of the assembly.

"All hardware, pulls, latches, fasteners, and connectors shall be flush or recessed on the surfaces of the components. Trim such as bezels and escutcheons may protrude 1/8" maximum. Attention must be given to aiding those people with hooks for limbs. The hook must be operable in the "down" position. Locks, if used, should have keys with large grasping ends.

"All doors and drawers shall be operable with one hand.

"All edges and corners of the work station assemblies and components shall be rounded, having a radius of 1/8" minimum. An eased or bevelled edge will not be acceptable.

"The system must allow for the placement of raised lettering signage in standard location, perpendicular to the line of travel, to direct the visually impaired or blind.

"The system must be able to provide sufficient color and value contrast between the wall panels and carpeting and non-system walls to permit identification by the visually impaired. The system must be able to provide color and value contrast among various office areas to help identify them for the visually impaired.

"Vertical panels should start at no higher than 8" from the floor or the system must have the capability to provide a crossbar at 8" to provide panel detection by blind long-cane users.

"The system must provide capability for all power receptacles, switches, and phones to be located no lower than 12" and no higher than 48" from the floor, and provide capability to prevent power cords running horizontally along the floor beneath work surfaces."

The final, complete version of these requirements, published in handbook form, along with information about their enforcement, will be available by telephoning:

Department of Health, Education, and Wel-

fare, Division of Architecture, 202-245-1923.

future studies

The next major research project to be undertaken by the GSA—contracts may have been signed before this issue is printed—is for the redesign of the central “Administrators’ Wing” of the GSA’s own office building at 18th and F Streets in Washington. As Joel Rudick says, the GSA “couldn’t have picked a more complicated situation” for such a study, but nevertheless there are expectations for an exceptionally high—not just adequate—level of design to result. The GSA preconception is that an open plan layout will be found to be most efficient and satisfactory, but a carefully chosen private-sector designer will make the final determination.

Another upcoming study—this one in Kansas City—will take advantage of the opportunity for redesign provided by a fire in an existing federal building complex. It will have open plan systems furnishings arranged with GSA advice, and with the results evaluated by GSA.

In Carbondale, Illinois, a new building will be similarly furnished and studied, this time with the use of systems furniture considered from the outset and allowed to affect the building design and equipment. Energy reduction will be a major goal.

supporting legislation

What is the underlying legal authority for the current operation of the GSA? In chronological order, some of the major legislation has been:

1949: Federal Property and Administrative Services Act—the law that first established the GSA.

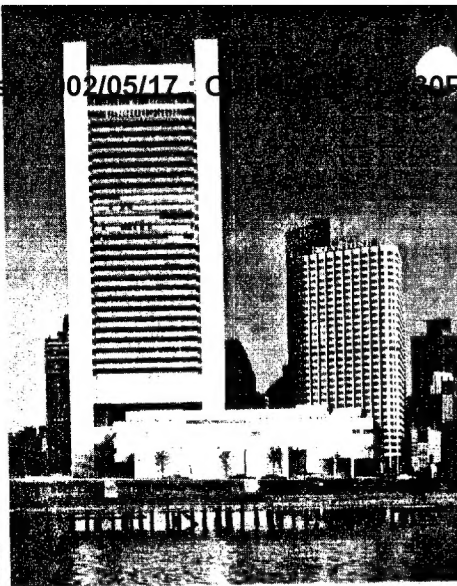
1966: National Historic Preservation Act—mandating the adaptive re-use of existing buildings.

1968: Architectural Barriers Act—mandating barrier-free design.

1972: Public Buildings Amendment—establishing the present landlord-tenant relationship between GSA and most other government agencies. Before this law, the GSA sought money from Congress for the design and maintenance of all space under its control; other agencies then requested space—usually as much as possible—from GSA. Now, money for space is appropriated to individual agencies, which apply to GSA for the amount of space they are willing to rent.

1976: Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act—encouraging the leasing of space in government buildings to private commerce and industry. The Federal Home Loan Bank Board (see previous spread) is the first building to comply with this law. The renovation of Washington’s Old Post Office (see *CONTRACT INTERIORS*, March, 1978) will also comply, as will a series of railroad station remodelings now in the planning stage.

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HUGH STUBBINS & ASSOCIATES
**FEDERAL RESERVE BANK
OF BOSTON**

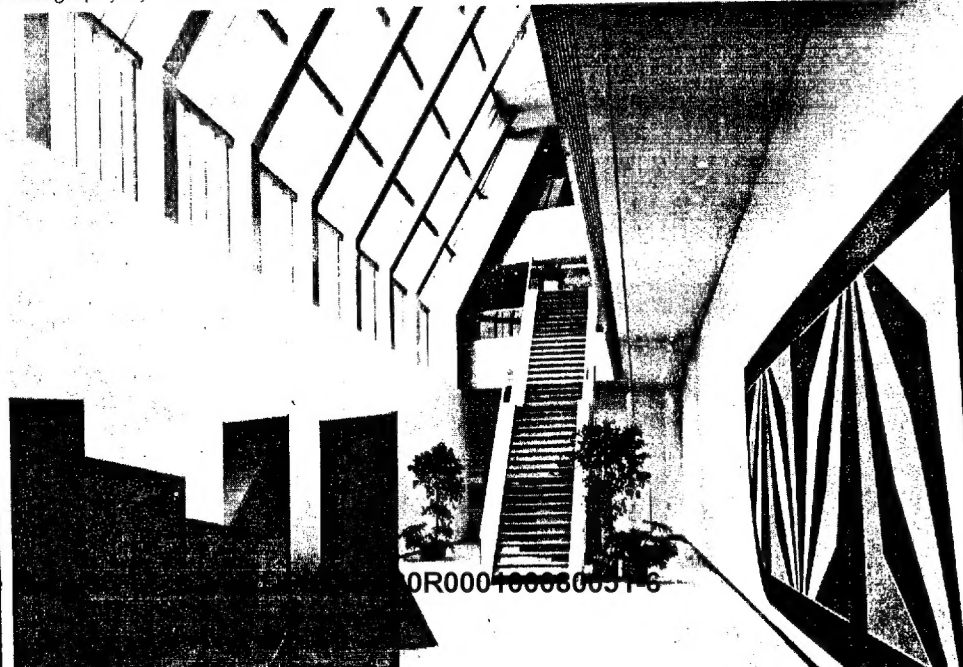
Beyond the GSA

Greater freedom, custom furniture, 1% for art.

The federal reserve system, established by Congress in 1913, is a government agency (and an important one—its control over credit has a vital influence on the economy), but it is one of those very *special* government agencies that fall outside the jurisdiction of the General Services Administration. The new headquarters building for the Boston federal reserve district, both its architecture and its interior design the work of Hugh Stubbins & Associates of Cambridge, is an example of what level federal design can reach when not limited by the rules that apply to typical government building programs. Office furniture here, for example (to be shown, along with a more complete study of the building, in a future issue of *CONTRACT INTERIORS*), is a system of modular oak components custom designed by the architects in collaboration with Knoll International. Philip Seibert was in charge of interior design for the Stubbins office.

33-story tower of the Federal Reserve bank building, above, is sheathed in highly reflective (and therefore energy conserving) aluminum; windows are protected by angled sunshades. An important public space, below, accommodates the assembly of large groups for public tours of the facility; under the greenhouse roof, a large painting by Frank Stella and a plexiglass sculpture by Larry Bell. (One percent of the total construction budget was set aside for art; typical federal buildings, under an enlightened program promoted by GSA Administrator Jay Solomon, have half of one percent to spend on art.)

Photography by Nick Wheeler



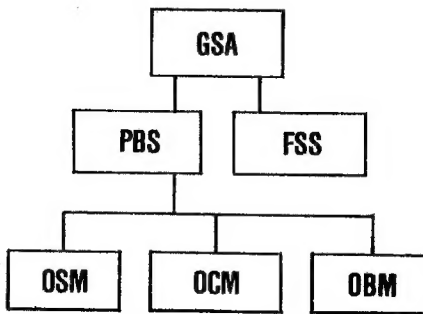
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federal design

GSA organization

How is the General Services Administration, our federal "landlord" agency, organized internally? The complete story is predictably complex, but the diagram below shows, in greatly simplified form, the relationship of those groups most directly concerned with interior design.

Two of the four main divisions of the GSA are the Federal Supply Service (of which the National Furniture Center is a part) and the Public Building Service. Three of the PBS's five divisions are: the Office of Space Management, with responsibility for growth planning, proper use of the existing building inventory, and space planning; the Office of Construction Management, with responsibility for managing design and construction both for new buildings and for renovations; and the Office of Buildings Management, with operating responsibilities after construction is completed. In addition to these central office functions are ten regional offices of the GSA.



GSA workload

What is the total quantity of space for which the GSA's Office of Space Management prepares planning services each year? The total projected annual workload is now 17,472,000 sq. ft., which can be broken down as follows:

Project size	No. of projects	Total sq. ft.	Service provided
Over 10,000 sq. ft.	497	7,455,000	total
5000-10,000 sq. ft.	446	3,568,000	partial
2500-5000 sq. ft.	740	2,960,000	decided case-by-case
less than 2500 sq. ft.	3,489	3,489,000	book only

The book provided for those projects so small that they must rely on self-help for their planning is "Space Planning Small Offices: A GSA Manual on How to Plan for and Occupy a Small Government Office." It was written by Larry Vanderburgh under the direction of Rick Hendricks, and it is admirably practical, readable, and jargon-free.

a few faces

A small sampling of the bright faces seen around the GSA and elsewhere these days—some new, some not, some key figures, others farther down the ladder. In every case, the faces represent intelligent efforts, within the federal government, towards good design.



David R. Dibner, FAIA, became the GSA's Assistant Commissioner for Construction Management eight months ago. Before that, he had been a teacher, an extensive writer, and a partner with the Grad Partnership. Since 1971 he had been vice-president of Walker-Grad, Inc., the interior design services firm.



Erma Striner, with experience at the AIA Research Corporation, as a consultant to the Educational Facilities Laboratories, and as a professional interior designer, has been Director, for the last two years, of the GSA's Design Action Center, an information exchange center which serves as a catalyst for federal design improvement.



Ron Reinsel, at the GSA now for almost three years, has brought a new field of knowledge to that organization—that of environmental psychology. In his first year, he says, there was "slow acceptance" of what his field could offer; now he heads a substantial program studying user responses to design.



Susan Reed McQueen, ASID, with seven years' experience as a private sector interior designer, joined the State Department as a

Senior Designer in 1963. In 1974 she became Chief of Interior Design and Furnishings for the Office of Foreign Buildings Operations.



Laurie Sieminski, with a B.S. in Design from Cornell University's Department of Design and Environmental Analysis, entered the government through the Presidential Management Intern Program, which places young people with different professional interests in federal agencies for a series of rotating assignments. Ms. Sieminski chose to stay in the GSA's Public Buildings Service and is now a Realty Specialist in the Space Standards and Research Branch.



Fred ("Rick") Hendricks is a registered professional engineer with a real estate license in Virginia. Until last September, Hendricks headed the Interior Planning Branch of the Special Projects Division in GSA's important Region 3. He now directs the National Policy Office for Space Planning, which, with 230 million sq. ft. of space within its planning and design scope, is the single largest consumer of space planning service in the world.



Joel Rudick has been with the federal government for two years, and is now the Chief of GSA's Interior Planning and Design Branch. Previously he had been with SLS Environetics for nine years, heading that firm's San Francisco office. In the last five of those years. He sees his present job as a rare opportunity to

have an impact on 10,000 building programs and, through them, on millions of people. Interior design, he says, "is about that—the effects structures have on people."

permanent employment

GSA Administrator Solomon has announced his plan to hire three new interior designers for each of the GSA's regional offices. Information about these specific job possibilities may be obtained by calling the regional offices (in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Denver, Fort Worth, Kansas City, New York, San Francisco, and Seattle).

For these or any other permanent government jobs, however, it is through the Civil Service Commission that the first formal steps must be taken. The CSC will provide a copy of Form 171, and the applicant must specify on it that he is applying for work as one of the following:

- Space planner
- Facilities planner
- Layout specialist

Interior planning and design specialist. (These apparently overlapping job descriptions will be explained by the CSC.) The applicant must also specify a preference for one of the following occupational codes:

- 153: Industrial Specialist
- 178: Housing/Building Management
- 310: Administrative Officer
- 315: Office Services Management.

For qualification for "entry level" positions—that is, for first-time government employment as a trainee—tests are required. These are administered by the CSC, which will then notify the applicant of the results. If a candidate is considered eligible, his application is then placed in an inventory. When a federal agency has a vacancy, it asks the CSC for a list, from its inventory, of qualified candidates. The agency then interviews the candidates and selects one; the others' applications are returned to the CSC for future use.

employment for a specific commission

How may interior designers be selected for specific design projects? For some work, interior designers are hired only as sub-contractors to architects and engineers, who are hired directly. In other cases, interior designers may be hired directly for "Expert and Consulting Services." In these latter cases, the project and its need for design services will first be found listed in the Commerce Department's COMMERCE BUSINESS DAILY, available at local GSA Business Service Centers or by subscription (\$75 per year) through the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 20402.

If interested in a project listed, a designer

should notify in writing his regional GSA office. These offices and their jurisdictions are:

Region 1

Post Office and Courthouse

Boston, Mass., 02109

(Jurisdiction over Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont)

Region 2

26 Federal Plaza

New York, N.Y., 10007

(New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands)

Region 3

300 Seventh Street, SW, Suite 301

Washington, D.C., 20407

(Delaware, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, District of Columbia)

Region 4

1776 Peachtree Street, NW

Atlanta, Ga., 30309

(Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, Kentucky, South Carolina, Florida, Georgia)

Region 5

Everett McKinley Dirksen Building

230 South Dearborn Street

Chicago, Illinois, 60604

(Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin, Michigan)

Region 6

Federal Building

1500 East Bannister Road

Kansas City, Mo., 64131

(Iowa, Michigan, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska)

Region 7

819 Taylor Street

Fort Worth, Texas, 76102

(Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas)

Region 8

Denver Federal Center, Building 41

Denver, Colo., 80225

(Colorado, Montana, Utah, South Dakota, Wyoming, North Dakota)

Region 9

525 Market Street

San Francisco, Cal., 94105

(Arizona, California, Hawaii)

Region 10

Regional Headquarters Building

Auburn, Washington, 98002

(Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington)

In response to the designer's letter, the GSA will send a Request for Proposal form. The designer must fill it out and return it. Until early this year, the GSA's choice of a designer would then have been made on the combined basis of technical ability (weighted 80% of the total) and price of the service offered (20%). This has now been replaced by a two-step selection process: first, a GSA panel will determine which applicants are technically acceptable; second, the choice from among these will be made solely on the basis of price. This change seems, unfortunately, to make economic considerations more important than before, design ability less important.

licensing of designers

Would licensing of interior designers qualify them to be selected by the more quality-oriented process now applicable to registered architects and engineers, rather than by the fee-oriented process described above? As things stand right at the present, it might; and, without exception, government officials questioned felt that licensing would bring about better government-designer working relationships. But the future will not necessarily be the same as the present. The sense of Congress is said by some to be very negative towards the current process for hiring architects and engineers. Although licensing might put designers in the same boat as architects, therefore, that boat may soon run aground. All that can be said now with certainty is that, so far as government work is concerned, licensing certainly wouldn't hurt.

government contractors

Independent contractors who represent groups of contract sources and who do business directly with the government include:

- Commercial Office Furniture Co.
9760 A George Palmer Highway
Lanham, Maryland 20801

Sources represented include ai (Atelier International), Steelcase, David-Edward Ltd., Harvey Probbler, Rose Manufacturing Co., Bolling Chair Co.

- Vanleigh Showrooms
4900 Harden Avenue
Bethesda, Maryland 20014

A small percentage of its total volume is government work. Specializes in executive office and residential furnishings.

- Charles G. Stott & Co.
Government Contract Division
1680 Wisconsin Ave., NW
Washington, D.C., 20007

A 90-year-old firm with 160 employees, 10 field reps., and 110 federal contracts (imagine the paperwork!). Stott represents over 100 top-of-line (or close to it) manufacturers, including Baker, Harter, Johnson Industries, Heywood-Wakefield, Lees carpet, Trend carpet.

- Concept Merchandising
3950 48th Street
Bladensburg, Maryland, 20710

- Executive Interiors
734 7th Street NW
Washington, D.C., 20001

Represents Adjusto Equipment Co., Datum, Marden Manufacturing, Modern Contract Furniture, Monarch Furniture Corp., Smokador, Stow-Davis, and Vogel-Peterson.

- General Office Furniture Wholesalers
2101 Wilson Blvd.

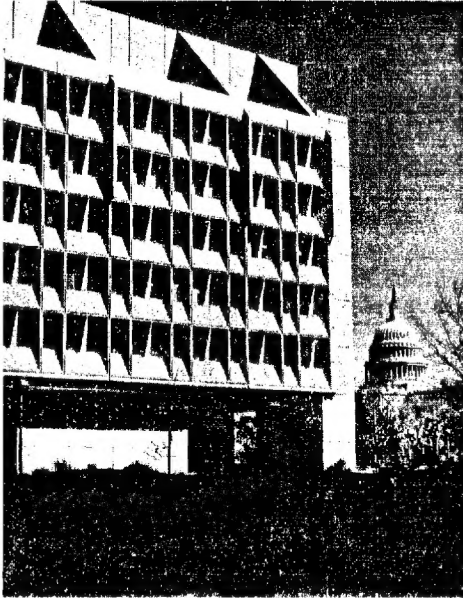
Arlington, Virginia, 22201

Represents Graber Drapery Hardware.

MARCEL BREUER AND HERBERT BECKHARD/NOLEN-SWINBURNE & ASSOCIATES
HUBERT H. HUMPHREY FEDERAL BUILDING

HEW on a bridge

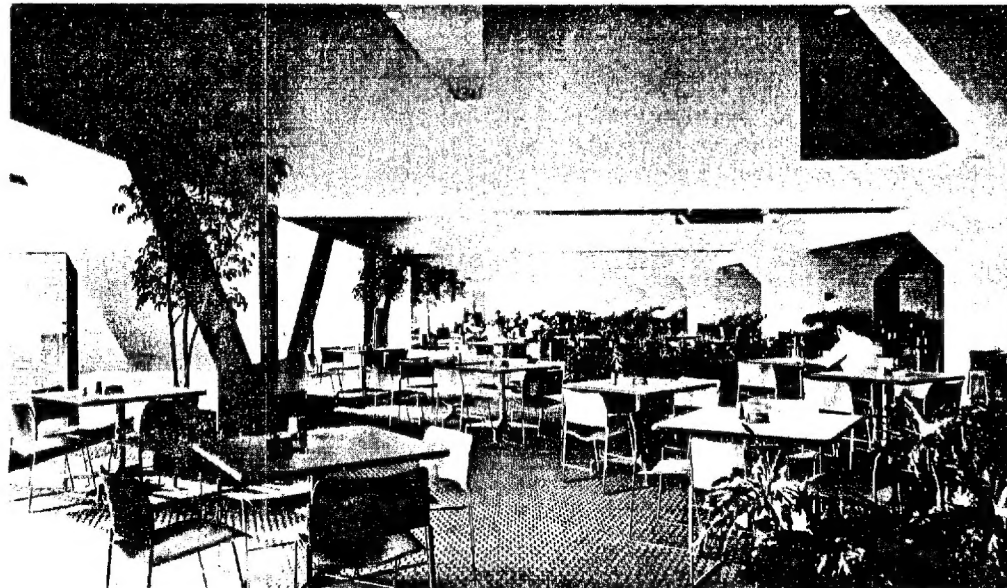
The site for GSA's systems furniture study is a building spanning a site that almost isn't there.



Photography by Robert Lautman

The accompanying text describes the General Services Administration's recent evaluation of open plan systems furniture, a study that has helped to finally put such furniture (with some temporary use restrictions) on the federal schedule of available products. The site for that study is a building which, in itself, demonstrates federal design concerns: the new Washington headquarters building for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare designed by Marcel Breuer and Herbert Beckhard of Marcel Breuer and Associates (with Nolen-Swinburne of Philadelphia as associates). Called the "South Portal" building during its planning stages, it has recently been named for the late Sen. Humphrey.

The building design is a clever response to a serious planning problem: despite the fact that space requirements and Washington's severe building height limitation (90 ft.) called for complete site coverage, much of that site was unbuildable. The Humphrey Building stands not on solid ground but over a large sewer line, an even larger vehicular tunnel—part of a new under-the-Mall highway system—and a network of supply and exhaust air ducts which service the tunnel. The architects' solution was to raise the building on a few widely spaced columns: these support enormous trusses (some of them 25 feet deep) at penthouse level, and from the trusses are hung the lower floors. Not only does this design "step over" the site problems below, but it also provides large column-free spaces for a number of ground-floor facilities (entrance



lobby, exhibition space, television studio, and auditorium). Nestled among the truss members at the top of the building is the cafeteria, its character largely derived from the exposed structure.

The nature of the office space on the typical floors made it a natural laboratory for open plan furniture testing. Space there is on a 5'2" x 5'2" module, each module containing full lighting and air conditioning services. The floor structure is a cellular steel deck with power and telephone outlets in each module.

Interior surfacing materials complement the exterior's precast concrete panels. Concrete, with exposed gray granite aggregate, continues inside; the main lobby floor is of polished dark gray stone, the same stone, in 6" x 6" tiles, covers the lobby walls, the visitors' center walls, and all elevator lobby walls. Natural woods and bright carpets soften the effect.

federal design

Tech, United Chair, R-Way, Milliken, Condi, Buckstaff, Thayer Coggin, Royal System, Wilson Metal Products, System Cado, Fritz Hansen, AC Graphics, Douron Library Furniture, Lombard Chair, B.L. Marble, and others.

- Walcott-Taylor Co.
4925 St. Elmo Ave.
Bethesda, Maryland, 20014
Represents Griggs, Clarin Manufacturing Co., and Mitchell Manufacturing Co.

- M. S. Ginn Co.
Marsden Government Contract Division
1755 Jefferson Davis Highway
Crystal Mall Building 1
Suite 1101
Arlington, Virginia, 22202

Represents many manufacturers—not only furniture, but also food service equipment, office products, medical products, and arts and crafts items.

- Marvin J. Perry Associates
4101 Howard Ave.
Kensington, Maryland, 20795
- W. D. Campbell Co.
1014 15th Street, NW
Washington, D.C., 20005
- Andrews Office Supply & Equipment
2335 18th Street, NE
Washington, D.C., 20018
Represents Cole, Russ-Bassett, Warshaw, and HON Industries.

design council

House bill HR7848 introduced last summer (by Rep. Henry Waxman, Democrat of California) and still in committee, would create, within the Dept. of Commerce, a U.S. Design Council to “educate U.S. entrepreneurs to the value of excellence in design, to encourage such entrepreneurs to promote excellence in design by the creation, manufacture, and sale of well-designed objects and systems, and to assist such entrepreneurs in the marketing of such objects and systems. . . .”

Would design—and designers—benefit from government commitment to these goals? The answer depends wholly, of course, on whether or not the government’s involvement were well-informed, establishing an acceptable level of “excellence in design.” England’s Design Centre, presumably a model Rep. Waxman had in mind, proves that such an organization can be effective. The fact that this is hardly the hottest issue before Congress allows the design community some time to consider the proposal. Congressmen can supply further information.

non-GSA design: Bill Slayton at the FBO

By no means all federal design activity falls within the GSA’s jurisdiction. Those agencies with their own design staffs—or, at least, with some control over the design of their own spaces—include the Departments of Agriculture,

Commerce, Defense, HEW, HUD, the Interior, Justice, Labor, State, and Transportation. Also independent to varying degrees are ERDA, NASA, and the Veterans Administration. A number of out-of-the-mainstream agencies, such as the Agency for International Development and the Federal Reserve Bank system are also largely autonomous.

For a sample of how such privileged groups operate, we visited the Office of Foreign Buildings Operations of the U.S. State Department. Our choice was prejudiced by the fact that, since early this year, the new head of the FBO has been William Slayton, for years a dynamic Executive Vice-President of the American Institute of Architects, and we wondered how an ex-AIA official might be faring in the Washington jungle.

We needn’t have worried, of course. Slayton seemed as decisive and energetic as he always did on all those platforms at all those AIA conventions. His office has jurisdiction over all government property abroad (other than that belonging to the military). Its 1979 budget for new furniture is \$2½ million; for maintenance, repair, and replacement, over \$6 million. One of the major criticisms of the office in the past, Slayton says, has been its disregard for time schedules. He means for that to change, expressing the greatest impatience with architects not recognizing the importance of time schedules and budgets. “Architects who disregard need not apply,” he says, and he says it firmly. “If you don’t want a tough client, don’t come to me. But the best thing a designer can have is a tough client.”

To assist Slayton in his duties is a three-member board of advisors. They are Francis Lethbridge, O’Neil Ford, and Joseph Esherick—certainly an impressive group.

Also assisting on a daily basis is the FBO’s own in-staff design group, headed by Susan Reed McQueen, ASID. There are six in her group: four designers, a china and glassware expert (for the many embassies included in the FBO’s buildings), and a purchasing agent. Assistance is sometimes brought in from the private sector as well, but most work is done in-house. Although there is no requirement that FBO purchases be limited to the GSA schedule, there is a mandate from Congress that U.S. goods be purchased whenever practical.

Slayton envisions an era of new design excellence as well as new efficiency. With 8000 properties under his jurisdiction, his success would have worldwide impact.

the prospects

There can be no authoritative summary of so complex a subject as federal design. It is clear, though, that there have been real accomplishments in recent months, and that there now are, within the government, able people with admirable energy working towards valuable goals. The federal government’s potential influence on design can hardly be overestimated, and we have great hopes for it.

STANLEY ABERCROMBIE

Opposite page, top, exterior view looking towards Capitol shows rooftop trusses from which lower floors are hung. Employees’ cafeteria, left, gains character from exposed trusses. Lobby, top of this page, is finished in concrete, granite, and slate, focuses on Marcel Breuer tapestry. Above, Knoll’s Zapf open plan system in HEW’s recent furniture evaluation (see page 75).

Employee cafeteria: Seating: GF. Tables: Krueger. Carpet: custom design manufactured by Stephen Leedom.